

284.05
Sy 67 bc

The Broad Church

A SERMON PREACHED IN
CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
MONTREAL.—DECEMBER 30TH, 1906

BY

REV. HERBERT SYMONDS, D.D.

Vicar

(Published by request)



MONTREAL

The Witness Press

1907

P284.05

Sy 187.60

The Broad Church

A SERMON PREACHED IN
CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL
MONTREAL—DECEMBER 30TH, 1906

BY
REV. HERBERT SYMONDS, D.D.
Vicar

(Published by request.)



MONTREAL
The Witness Press
1907

31001101000
309102-1000

The Broad Church

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things."

"For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as also I have been known."—I. Cor. 13: 11, 12.

Our subject this morning is the Broad Church School of Thought in the Anglican Church.*

And my task is in some respects more difficult than with the previous sermons of this course, because the Broad Church school of thought has never been a party in the sense in which the Low and High Church parties were. It has no newspaper to propagate its views, it is not organized, it has no Divinity Schools pledged to its teachings. We are able to trace out the history of the Low and High Church schools from the time of the Reformation, but we cannot do this in the case of the Broad Church. No doubt there have been men of the Broad Church temperament in every period of our history. Lord Bacon was a Broad Churchman. In the 17th century a band of scholars at the University of Cambridge, known as the "Cambridge Platonists," were Broad Churchmen, but they have no special affinity with the Broad Churchmen of the 18th or 19th centuries.

The Broad Church school of thought is therefore somewhat difficult to define. It may, perhaps, best be described as an influence which like leaven pervades the whole mass of religious thought. It has been a moderating force in English Church life and history. It has stood between the High and

*This sermon was the last of a course on the subject of "Schools of Thought in the Anglican Church."

the Low Church parties, and has in various ways modified the intensity of party strife.

But if it had done no more than this it would scarcely be worthy of a special sermon, and I must therefore seek to set forth as clearly as possible its contribution to the stream of Anglican Church life.

The most notable thinker and writer of the Broad Church school in the 19th century was Frederick Denison Maurice, a man who is not widely known owing to the peculiar style in which his books are written. But to the profound influence he has exerted on Anglican theology, the following quotation by a leading theologian of Cambridge bears striking testimony:

"The chief religious movements of the past sixty years," writes Professor Stanton, "are connected with the names of Cardinal Newman and F. D. Maurice. They are the two men during this period whom we may speak of as men of religious genius. More quickly than others they saw the new questions that were dawning, more intensely than others they felt the new influences, and then sent them forth from themselves again with vastly multiplied power. And though Maurice was immeasurably inferior to Newman in powers of expression, and though he was without some other gifts for which Newman is remarkable, he is surely greatly the superior in breadth and sobriety of judgment and real reverence for truth."

"In real reverence for truth!" Is it possible to name a higher quality in a teacher or a writer than this? Real reverence for the truth, and a willingness to seek after it wherever it may be found. Broad Churchmen have seldom attained to the high places in the Church, because in the Church, as well as elsewhere, party spirit too often prevails over other considerations. But real distinction is by no means dependent upon titles, and the names of F. D. Maurice, Arnold of Rugby, Dean Stanley, Robertson of Brighton, and Charles Kingsley, would have acquired no brighter lustre by the addition of ecclesiastical titles.

I.

(1) The Broad Church movement is comprehensive, and that in two ways: (a), theoretically and (b), practically.

(a) It is comprehensive theoretically, i.e., in regard to theological doctrines, because it holds that human language is inadequate perfectly to express Divine truths. Religion has to do with the Infinite. But human language cannot perfectly express the Infinite. Hence Broad Churchmen are less attached to the *ipsissima verba* of creeds or articles than High Churchmen. They believe that the best of creeds is only an adumbration of truth, and not the very truth itself. And always above the creed stands the Living Person of Whom the creed speaks. You will remember how Tennyson, who is a typical Broad Churchman, describes the life of Christ as the only perfect creed:

And so the Word had breath and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds
More strong than all poetic thought.

It follows from this thought of the imperfection of language a' ny one period to give complete and final statement of theological truth that discussion of the deepest truths is not only lawful but it is necessary. Real reverence will never forbid a man to think.

The claims of various parties to absolute and final knowledge have never issued in anything but disaster for those who make them. We remember Galileo and many another case in point, and we see how the frank recognition of limits to human knowledge of Divine things would have preserved the Church from many a defeat.*

*Every Divinity student should be made to read Andrew D. White's "Conflict of Science and Theology," both for the copious illustrations which it offers of this point, and in order that he may learn the danger of sweeping statements regarding necessary truths. It would not be difficult to collect from this work at least twenty statements of things which have been confidently affirmed to be necessary

The Broad Church school, however, is very far from despising creeds or systems. It has too keen an appreciation of history for this. It knows that all creeds and systems are the expression of long periods of ardent and painstaking thought. It regards them as landmarks of the successive stages in the progress of the human mind, as, not without Divine guidance, it steadily advances in its knowledge and comprehension of Divine things. Hence the Broad Church always looks forward. It has no ideal period of history. It does not exalt any particular century of the past as presenting the type and norm of the Church. Its motto is, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

(b) And out of this theoretical comprehensiveness there springs the practical. If the Broad Church cannot accept any statement of Infinite truth as *per se* final, so neither can it say: This or that Communion of Christians is absolutely right, or absolutely wrong.

It will not say to one, "Because you have not the Apostolic Succession you are not of the Church." Nor will it say, to another, "Because you have not the true doctrine of Justification," or, "Because you do not teach Predestination," or, "Because you have added and mingled with the truth much of error and superstition—therefore we cannot recognize you as in covenant relations with Christ." But it will strive to recognize good wherever it may be found.

(2) Again, the Broad Church is sympathetic with modern thought. It never shared in nor sympathized with the successive panics that fell upon the Church when first geological discovery and then biological theory came into violent contact with old-established ideas. Against the torrent of abuse and ridicule that was by too many Christian people of all denominations poured upon the names of men who were simply investigating the laws and processes of Nature, they vehemently protested, and it is certainly largely due to their

to the very existence of Christianity, which few if any theologians now believe or, at any rate, insist upon. But it is this dogmatic spirit that is largely responsible for the estrangement between thoughtful people and organized Christianity.

efforts that Science to-day pursues unmolested the even tenor of its way. Kingsley, a man of no mean scientific attainments, was not afraid to call Darwin his "dear and honored master." Maurice, although not a student of science, often quoted the spirit of Darwin's investigation as an example to theologians, and uttered his protest against the prejudiced and even malignant attitude of Bishop Wilberforce.

(3) It has been said that Broad Churchmen not only sit lightly to creeds but are disloyal to Christ. I have already admitted that this school of thought is less wedded to creeds than others, but not for one moment would I admit that it is disloyal to Christ. Nay, the very reverse of this is the case. It believes that the true spirit of Christ is not perfectly represented in the older forms of orthodoxy. It holds that the Church itself needs nothing so much as a revival of the Spirit of Christ and its application to the circumstances of to-day. It claims, and it is impossible truthfully to dispute the claim, that Christ Himself had to contend against the narrowness, the exclusiveness, and the traditionalism of His day, and that in their spirit, the narrowness, exclusiveness, and traditionalism of the Scribes and Pharisees is paralleled in some quarters in our day. It claims, and to me the claim seems absolutely irrefutable, that Christ put all forms, systems, and ceremonies into an entirely subordinate place. When men came to him with their traditions, and claimed that they were venerable with age, and endorsed by the Rabbis, he simply taught that if their effect was to make men narrow, and contentious, or hard and superstitious, then they made the word of God of none effect. "Go," He said to the Church of His day, "Go ye and learn what this means, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.'"

(4) The problems of to-day are of a fundamental kind. They go down to the roots of things. In connection with such problems, what avails is not tradition, but truth; not what the Fathers said, or the Reformers, but what is the Mind of Christ. And that is the aim of the Broad Churchman. Not to obscure the light of Christ's truth by mixing it up with human interpretations, but to set forth in clearest fashion

what Christ really taught, what He really regarded as of first rate importance, what were the unchanging principles which He applied to His generation's needs, and which we, learning of Him, may apply to our own.

(5) The central doctrine of Christianity, which we are celebrating at this season of the year, is that of the Incarnation or the Manifestation of God in Christ. It was F. D. Maurice who revived that doctrine and restored it to its true place, and sought to apply it to all the conditions of human life, and it was Bishop Westcott, an ardent admirer of Maurice's, who gave it even wider range in virtue of his influential position as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge.

II.

In connection with the Low and High Church parties, I ventured in previous sermons upon some words of criticism. And although my sympathies are with the Broad Church school, I am not at all concerned to deny that it has its own weakness and dangers.

(1) For example, Comprehensiveness is not without its dangers. It may spring, not from a love of truth or of man, but from indifference to truth. Again, the position that doctrines are only relatively true may degenerate into an attack upon dogma itself.

To say that human language can only partly express infinite truth, does *not* involve the conclusion—"Therefore all theology is vain." It is not likely that science will ever perfectly reveal all the truth of Nature, but science is not therefore to be tabooed. But there is no doubt that just as the danger of the High Churchman is traditionalism, and of the Low Churchman the use of certain shibboleths, so the disease of the Broad Church is indifference, which may gradually degenerate into Agnosticism. But these things only illustrate the truth that mankind is not saved by systems. You are not *per se* a better man for being either High, Low, or Broad. Francis of Assisi, Jeremy Taylor, William Wilberforce, John Wesley, Samuel Rutherford, Dr. Pusey, F. D. Maurice, James

Martineau, represent different Churches, and different schools of thought, but we easily admit that all were Saints. But none of them were indifferent to truth, or contemptuous of religion. Each was intensely in earnest, and it was their clear faith, sincerity and earnestness that made them what they were, fearless, sincere, devoted. Yes, faith, sincerity, earnestness, these are the great things, and of these no school of thought has the monopoly. Better a good Catholic than a bad Protestant, better a sincere High Churchman or Low Churchman than an indifferent Broad Churchman.

(2) Another danger that besets Broad Churchmen is shallowness. "All Creeds are alike," "It doesn't matter what you believe," and the like, are broad statements which have a little element of truth, but it is very shallow truth. If by the statement, "It doesn't matter what a man believes," you mean that Life is better than Creed, then I agree with you, but if you mean that a man need not worry or think about the greatest problems of life and thought, then you must forgive me if I maintain that that is a shallow conclusion. Such a position indicates, at any rate for most people, an indolent mind, or one which simply plays on the surface of things. The Emersons, Carlyles, Ruskins, Brownings, Tennysons, the men who stand out from their fellows as types and exemplars, have always thought, and thought deeply, sincerely, earnestly, and reverently about the great problems of man's relations to the Infinite.

(3) It is sometimes urged against Broad Churchism, as a reproach, that it could never evangelize the world. It could not produce a Wesley, or a Spurgeon, or a Moody. It cannot, it is said, go down to the depths and save the degraded, or convert the savage. I admit the truth of the statement, only I do not think it is fair as a criticism. For Broad Churchmen do not claim to have all the truth. It is a part of their Broad Churchism to recognize the good in others with which they cannot compete. In my first sermon of this course I took for my text St. Paul's striking words: "There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit." The Evangelist's gift is one, the Thinker's is another, the Organizer's is a third,

■

and so on. I could not do the work that Mr. Taylor is doing in the Old Brewery Mission, but I am glad to go down there when I am asked and speak in my own way to those whom he gathers together there. I am very glad that they should wish to have me, and to feel that if I cannot convert the degraded, or the ignorant, I can yet say a word of good cheer to them. I do not think Broad Churchmen feel that they are in any sense more important people than others. They simply believe that there are diversities of gifts, and that in the building of the vast temple of regenerated humanity there is a work for them to do.

But do not suppose that Broad Churchmen never think of or try to alleviate the sufferings or to elevate the lives of the poorest. That would be a great mistake. In the East End of London no man has done a greater work than Canon Barnett. The whole Social Settlement movement sprang out of the Broad Church school of thought. F. D. Maurice, Kingsley, and Robertson were devoted to the cause of Social Reform, and suffered in the cause.

(4) Another objection is sometimes urged against the Broad Church school which is sometimes, I think, well taken, but to which a reply can be made.

The complaint is made that Broad Churchmen are so vague and so indefinite that no one can tell exactly what they mean. We like, it is said, something clear, something definite. I am afraid that objection will always be lodged against this school. For they may be described as the pioneers of theological thought and progress, and pioneer work is always somewhat vague. The backwoodsman has no hard-broken roads through the forest, and when he pushes on to new territory he has not even a trail. And if he is asked for granolithic pavement, or macadamized roads, he can but shrug his shoulders and say: "Those will come in good time—but we can't have them now." A new continent would never be opened up but for the pioneers, and there are continents of thought. Let me read to you the way in which one of the foremost Broad Church thinkers in England to-day, Dr. Rashdall, of Oxford, states and replies to this objection:

“ ‘Why,’ says the objector to the Broad Churchman; ‘Why can’t you tell us exactly where you are going to stop with your new explanations and interpretations. Surely there must be this or that neat, compact, rounded body of well-defined doctrine on which the Church must always take her stand! Why don’t you tell us where to find it, and then we shall understand each other?’ No,” replies Dr. Rashdall, “there is the fallacy! That is just what we cannot do! Not because we expect the formula of Nicaea will ever lose its value, but because we recognize that already for those who most insist upon the value of creeds there are in them many things which don’t mean to the men of to-day exactly what they meant to former ages. . . . Change, expansion, development, we must expect, and development may involve the transformation, or even the surrender, of some things which many of us now hold precious.

“But to ask us to specify in advance exactly what the changes shall be would be to ask us to anticipate the progress of thought. . . . Enough for us if we can catch what the Holy Spirit is saying in audible trumpet tones to the Church of our own day.”

But some definiteness there must be, and I would submit to you that we may learn from Christ what are the definite things of importance.

Upon some topics, about which many High Churchmen not only desire but insist upon definiteness, Christ was not definite. But I should say that He was very clear on these points:

(a) God is to be regarded and approached by all men as Father. This means that every man may approach Him as a child approaches its Father, without the necessary mediation of priest or preacher or sacrament. If the priest or the preacher or the sacrament can help the wanderer to the Father, and no doubt they often can, well and good. For they are not the permanently necessary mediators.

(b) The nature and character of God is revealed, Christ taught, by Himself. I do not think there is the slightest room for doubt that our Lord did from beginning to end of His

ministry present Himself in a unique sense as the revealer of the Father.

(c) God never leaves His children. He is present amongst men always as the Holy Spirit.

(d) Man's relation to man is that of brother. All social duties and relations are to conform to that relationship.

(e) There is another order or sphere of existence and our welfare in it is dependent upon our lives here.*

That is definite teaching. *That* the Broad Churchmen teaches definitely. But on many subjects about which men demand definite teaching Christ was quite indefinite.

He said nothing, *e.g.*, about the manner of His own birth. Nor is there any trace of any teaching of any kind on the subject in the Acts of the Apostles, or the Epistles. Jesus Christ said nothing about Original Sin, or the fall of Adam. Those may be very true doctrines, but they did not form part of any definite teaching of Christ. Jesus Christ certainly taught that His Life was in some sense a Sacrifice, but He did not exactly define its nature. In all these things, and many more, Christ was indefinite, and man can express the elements of truth which they enshrine in various forms.

St. John says that the convincing proof of the Lord's Divinity was the fulness of His grace and truth, and that is a point that Broad Churchmen have ever emphasized, and nineteen centuries have not weakened but strengthened it. St. Peter said that the moving force which convinced him that he was in the presence of the Son of God was the words of eternal life which fell from his Master's lips like showers of living water upon a parched land. And nineteen centuries have reinforced this argument. Still, as we read our Gospels, we cry, "Never man spake as this man speaks," and "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

The Broad Church then stands for Comprehension upon the basis not of any elaborate system of thought, or doctrine, nor upon that of Uniformity in Ritual and Worship, but upon the

*It is not intended to claim that these are the only definite things in Our Lord's teaching. They are simply given as examples.

broad basis of personal devotion to a living Christ. At this point it stands related to the Low Church school. It regards the Person and Teaching of Christ as the basis of all Christian thought and practice; it is, too, in accord with the same school of thought in placing the Bible at the head of our religious authorities, "only it insists that the Bible to which we appeal shall be the Bible studied and understood; the Bible in the light of criticism, of science, and of history." On the other hand, the Broad Church school is in touch with the High Church in its emphasis upon the idea of the Church as a world-wide religious community. What it desires to show is that it "is possible to have a strong idea of the claims, the mission, the destiny of the Christian Society, without mistaking the Clergy for the Church, and without making the mechanical fact or fiction of the Apostolic Succession into the touchstone of Catholicity." *

Lastly, the Broad Church is progressive in spirit. And herein lies the appropriateness of this subject for the last Sunday of another year. Let us not look too regretfully upon the past, whether it be that of our own individual lives, or the past history of the Church. Some may sigh for the tone and temper of the 4th Century, some may wish they lived in the times of the Reformation, some may think that forty or fifty years ago, when all these troublesome questions were unheard of, that then were the good old times. Ah, think again! Were there no ills in the 4th Century? Was it not in those times that bishops kicked each other to death in their councils, and that a band of ignorant monks assassinated the noblest woman of the day! †

And as unbiassed historians are setting forth to us the true facts of the Reformation we find that, whilst it was a progressive age, it was very far from being the golden age of the Church.

It is not much more than one hundred years since scores of innocent women were destroyed by grave theologians

* Rashdall.—"Christus in Ecclesia" pp. 347, 348.

† "Hypatia."

on the charge of witchcraft. It is the progress of thought that has abolished that ignorant cruelty.

One hundred years ago one of the best and most learned men of the day (he was not by any means the only one), could say to approving congregations that one of the supreme joys of the saved would be the spectacle of the tortures of the damned. We should not like to be told that to-day.

Was there no wrangling and jangling forty years ago, over surplices in the pulpit, or in the choir? Ah, dear brethren, on this last Sunday of the year, I bid you once more, Have faith in God, have faith that the world is growing better. Look forward, not backward; look upward, not downward. Do not let your zeal or your love grow cold. But with cheerfulness, with confidence, with love to God and love to man, let us take up the task which is committed to the Church of the twentieth century, the task of "transforming this modern world into a Christian Society, . . . and to gather together the scattered forces of a divided Christendom into a confederation in which organization will be of less account than fellowship with one spirit and faith in one Lord—into a Communion wide as human life, and deep as human need—into a Church which shall outshine even the golden glory of its dawn by the splendour of its eternal noon."

2025-10-18
10:10:10-11:11:11

